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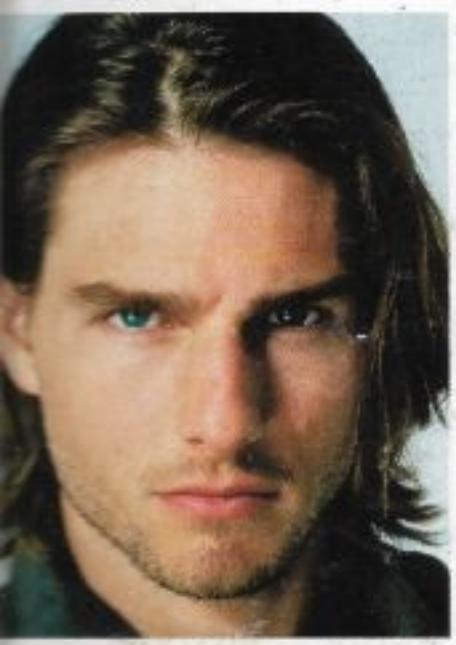

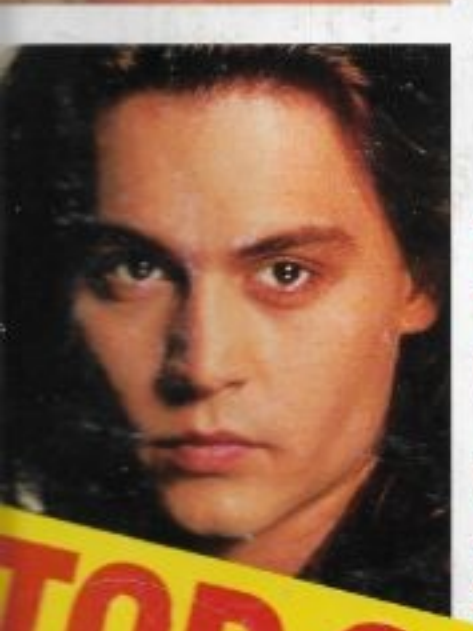

100 SEXIEST MOVIE STARS OF ALL TIME

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Cameron Diaz: where does she come? Find out inside . . .

Every New FILM Reviewed & Rated

TOP GERE! ON THE SET OF FIRST KNIGHT

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NEW FILMS

The films reviewed over the following 12 pages are released in the UK during the month of July. They are rated as follows:

★★★★★	UNMISSABLE
★★★★	VERY GOOD
★★★	GOOD
★★	FAIR
★	TRAGIC

BATMAN FOREVER

DIRECTED BY... JOEL SCHUMACHER
STARRING..... VAL KILMER
JIM CARREY
TOMMY LEE JONES
NICOLE KIDMAN
CHRIS O'DONNELL
CERT. 12 (TBC) *DURATION* 2 HRS. 1 MIN. USA
OPENS NATIONWIDE ON JULY 14

WHEN TIM BURTON DECLINED TO PICK up the creative tab for the second Batman sequel, Joel Schumacher was considered the ideal man to carry his Gothic vision, and, hopefully, pep up a franchise showing signs of fatigue in the commerciality stakes. Schumacher's credentials are encouraging; the commercial safety of The Client and The Lost Boys mixed with the darker designs of Falling Down and Flatliners.

Yet no sooner had the series replaced its director, when the cape itself was suddenly vacated — with creative differences cited as the nominal excuse for Michael Keaton's departure. The sexier Val Kilmer was swiftly ushered in, cave left, and it seemed like Batman Forever had become the perfect opportunity to rediscover the Dark Knight.

Things have certainly changed, but Schumacher hasn't managed to shrug off the hollowness that dogs this superheroic saga. Fans of Burton's fantastically stylish, thinly plotted films will be sated, but those hungry for plot logic and cohesive characterisation will find themselves watching the closing credits with unanswered pangs.

Batman has always been more about the evil guys than the one of indeterminate morality. And the villainous double act in question here: mad DA Two-Face (Lee Jones, half his face corroded by acid, half his mind gone the way of cuckoo), and The Riddler (Carrey dressed in skin-tight pea-green with a wonderful flat-top shock of orange hair), are as screen-gobbling as ever, the former simply seeking general chaos, the latter with a plan to absorb all the IQ from Gotham with his TV mindsuck gadget. Meanwhile, Batman is getting hot around the cowl for criminal psychologist Chase Meridian (Kidman), herself determined to see who is under the black rubber.

The uneven script also throws in a strangely familiar mad scientist called Ed Nygma — mightily cheesed off at Wayne Enterprises for ditching his TV mind enhancer gadget — much pyschobabbling about duality and mask adornment, and an overload of high pitch visual set-pieces which, whittled down, are just jazzed-up car chases, punch-ups and bits of Gotham exploding. And then there is Robin. At once the riskiest venture in the movie, Chris O'Donnell's appearance as the geeky sidekick is one of the film's biggest successes. A circus acrobat stalking Two-Face for the murder of his family, he cuts a petulant, mean and arrogant figure in his rubber suit, sweating it out with Bruce Wayne for a slice of the action. The young hero adds a whole new dimension.

The other, perhaps more predictable success, is Carrey's Riddler. While Kilmer is no better or worse than Keaton — the role is still a blank, with that suit restricting the poor actor to an unflattering waddle — Lee Jones simply does a fittingly exaggerated Joker routine, and Kidman vamps up an appealing but inconsequential love interest, the buck-toothed megastar is *magic*. His figure contorting with glee, his familiar shtick edged with blackness like some psychotic vaudeville swinger. The film lifts whenever he bounces in.

There's no doubt that the money is all up there on the screen: fabulous effects and bigger, brighter sets capturing a sumptuous comic-book feel. And Batman Forever is easily the *funniest* of the three.

What the film lacks, however, is restraint. It too often careers out of control with its hectic and demented pace — often murder on the senses — leaving the story cowering in the background. Schumacher's spin on the black-suited vigilante ends up as flawed as it is brilliant, as messy as it is impressive. A bit of a two-face really.

★★★

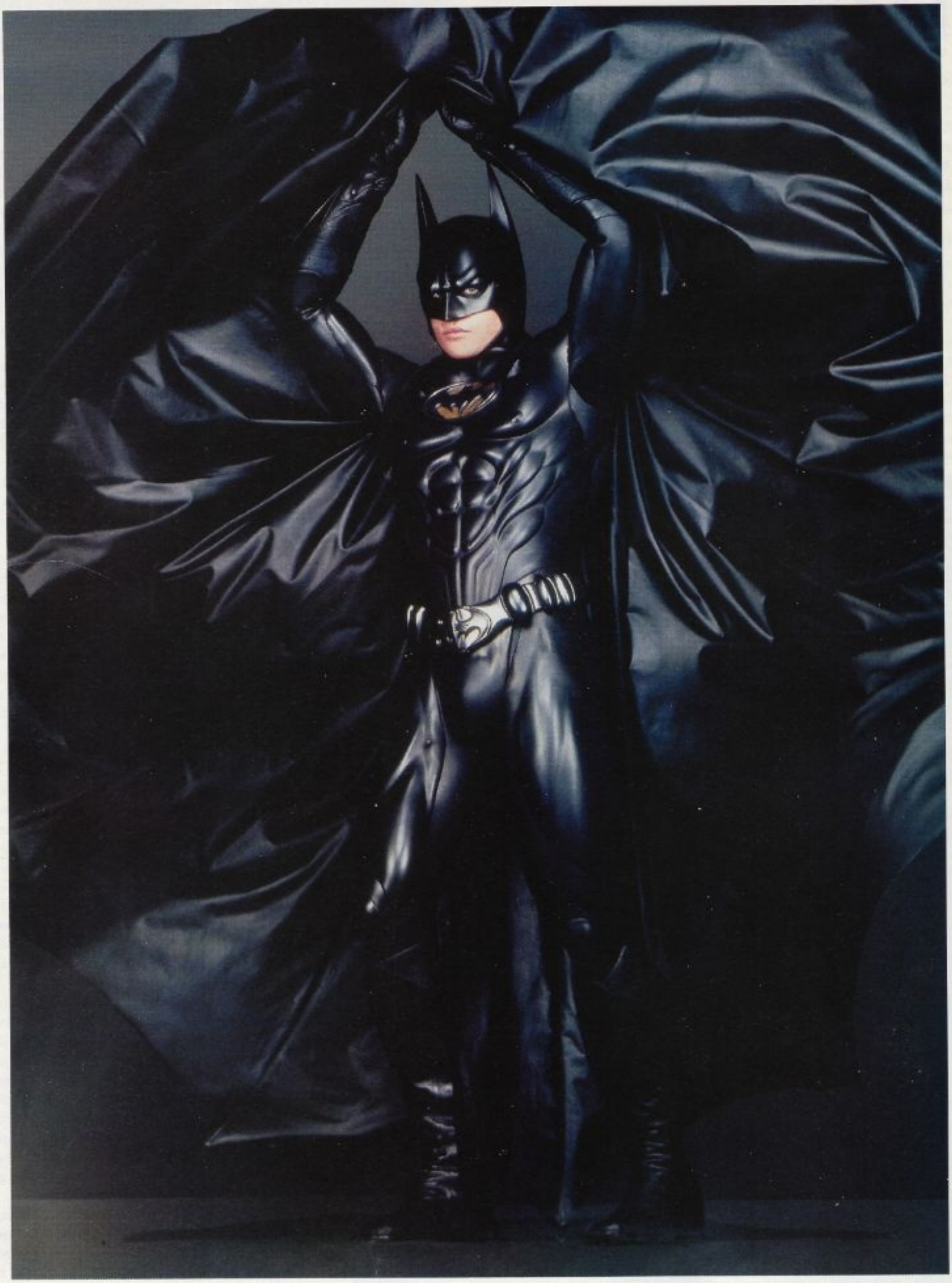
IAN NATHAN

Bad guys Jim Carrey and Tommy Lee Jones: "Screen gobbling."

Batman Forever: "As flawed as it is brilliant, as messy as it is impressive."

Hold Me, Thrill Me, Kiss Me, Kilmer

Holy threequel! The Dark Knight re-returns in **Batman Forever**, third part of what has become a true American trilogy — except this time his chin belongs to Val Kilmer, and the villains are played by Oscar-endorsed Tommy Lee Jones and total banker Jim Carrey. The question is: can they have their cape and beat it? Ian Nathan goes in to bat . . .



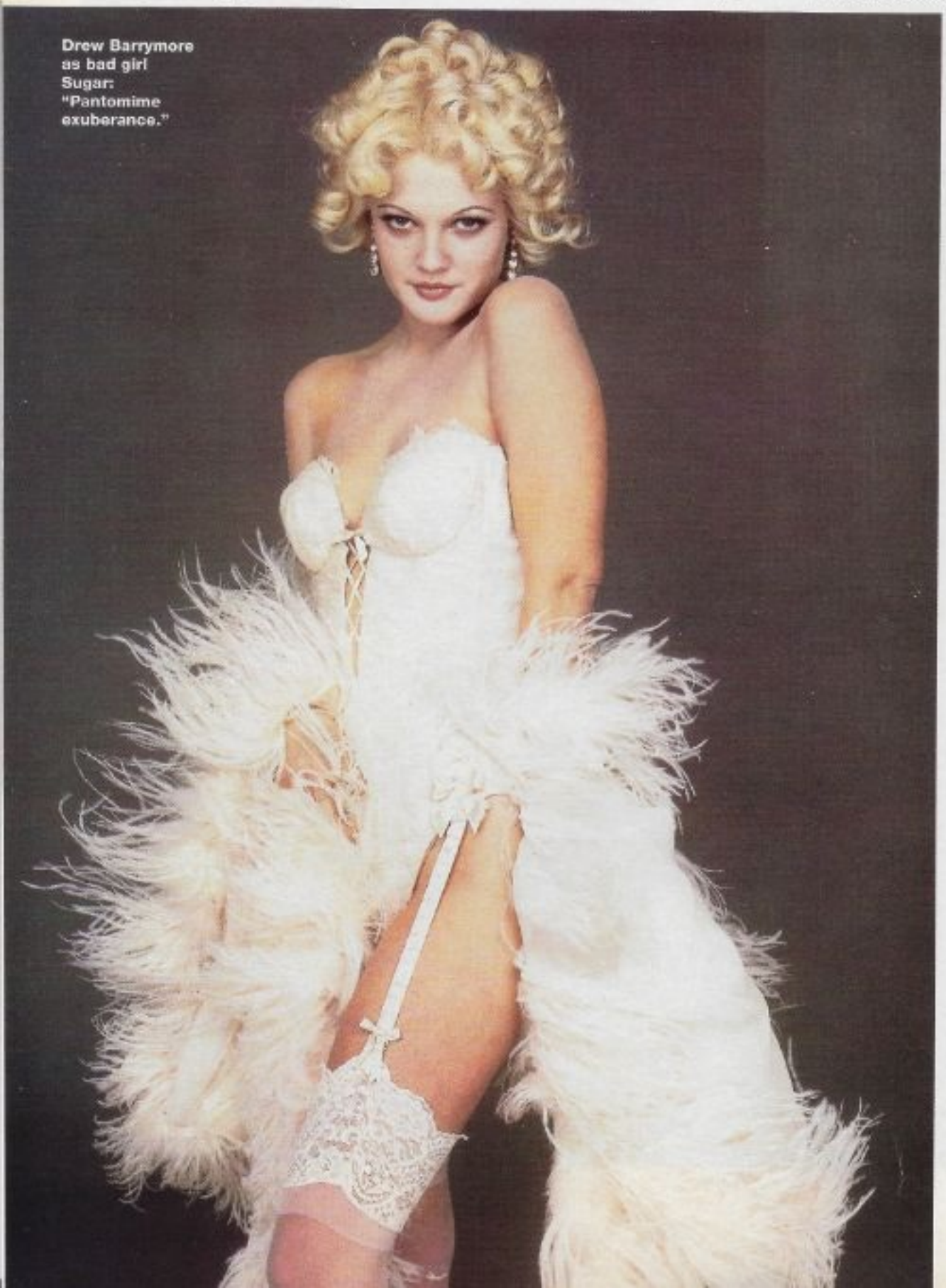
THE DARK NIGHT RETURNS, BUT ATLANTA STILL FEELS LIKE a microwave. Currently girding its confederate loins to be 1996 Olympiad landlord (a huge clock counts down the days on a freeway bridge: 411 to go), Georgia's capital is being slowly suffocated by humidity. Deep in one of Atlanta's shapeless malls, a gaggle of sticky, overfed journalists are being quietly but forcibly ushered into a sharply air-conditioned auditorium by a seemingly endless array of Warner Brothers personnel. It's June 1, 1995, and we are the first to see the Dark Knight return. Again.

Batman has come to the Deep South. Gathered here to waffle, spout, pour and pontificate are the eclectic team of stars and ebullient director responsible for giving shape and form to the third in the DC Comics-based superhero franchise. However, the caped crusader and his looming movie edifice have had a major facelift . . .

"It was unlike anything I had done before. I didn't even look at the script or check who the director was."
New Batman Val Kilmer

Tim Burton's visionary 1989 movie adaptation of Batman unearthed a whole new Gothic mythos for the hero, ditching Robin and all the camp, colours, tights and crackpot cliffhangers of the 60s TV serial. He applied sensibilities black as the inside of a goat. Basically, Batman was a screw-up, trailing personality defects as well as his coal-coloured cape, but not half as flipped as the screaming mad bunch of villains he got to trade *ker-pows* with. Batman and 1992's Batman Returns went big-time, the bad guys (and gal) stole the show, plot was hard to find, profit was easy. Try to the tune of $700 million worldwide.

And so to 1995 and number three, Forever, and there's no Tim Burton. He couldn't face it — although rumour had it that Warners were worried he just wasn't commercial enough any more; that his sensibilities were drifting too far from the mainstream. Enter Joel Schumacher and some major changes. Bruce Wayne is still a tormented guy, but he's younger with better lips. He's Val Kilmer. This time there's real sky and fresh air (New York and L.A. exterior locations). There are more special effects, bigger shinier sets, and even more one-liners. There's The Riddler, lean, green and mean, courtesy of the cavorting athletics of Jim Carrey, and schizo DA Harvey Dent, known as Two-Face because he has half the face of Tommy Lee Jones and half a Tommy Lee Jones pizza, in purple. There's a bigger, better Batmobile and more gadgets, and *chez* Batman — the cave — has been redecorated. Oh yes, and finally there's a Robin. Chris O'Donnell, a goody-goody if ever there was one, suits up in purple and green. Forever, carrying Warners' hopes of a bounteous summer, is Batman changed with the times.



Drew Barrymore as bad girl Sugar: "Pantomime exuberance."

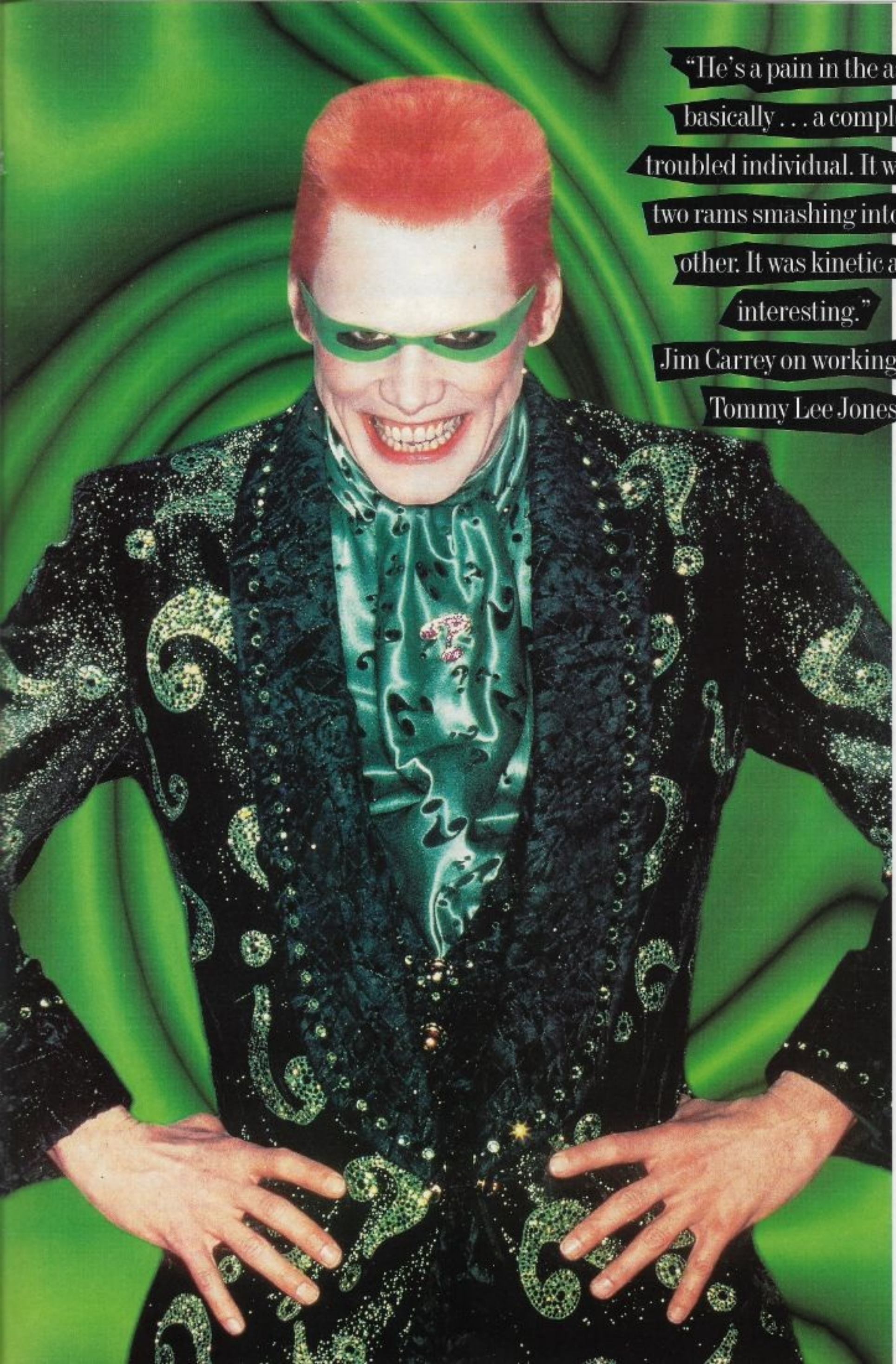
"We have a saying in the United States that imitation is the highest form of flattery," says Schumacher, slender and charming, smiling ear to ear, "but I don't think it is at all."

He seems to be enjoying himself. The slightly effete, wholly camp 53-year-old director, who has toed the commercial line on such hits as The Client and The Lost Boys, as well as daring to shake it up with riskier projects such as Flatliners and Falling Down, is keen, dead keen, to talk Batman. After two years living, breathing, eating and sleeping the comic book hero, all he has to do now is open his mouth and talk about it. Naturally, the first question he faces happens to include the words "Tim" and "Burton".

"I think that you insult the person that you imitate. I think that you insult yourself, and most of all you insult the audience by being an imitation," says the director. "I wasn't asked to do a sequel, I was asked to do my version of it. There are so many Batman comics now; there's Batman in the future, there's Batman vampires, there's Batman whose back has been broken by The Thing. There's even a blond Frenchman who is now Batman. It seemed to me that we could make another edition of the Batman comic. And when Val came to the movie we really didn't have the same Batman/Bruce Wayne, we had more licence."

When Warners decided their most successful franchise needed a further adventure, its creative father declined to pick up where he had left off. For Burton, Batman wasn't forever. He had given everything he could to the character; it needed a new slant, fresh blood. Studio executives immediately suggested Schumacher, a studio-friendly director renowned for bringing in movies on time, on budget and popular with those on the other side of the ticket booth. Schumacher proved eager, as long as things were cool with the post's former occupant.

"Tim and I are friends," says Schumacher, pulling his long, grey hair away from his forehead. "We met while I was making The Lost Boys at Warner Brothers. Tim, who was readying Beetlejuice, used to come and visit the set. And when Bob Daly and ➤



"He's a pain in the ass, basically . . . a complex, troubled individual. It was like two rams smashing into each other. It was kinetic and interesting."

Jim Carrey on working with Tommy Lee Jones

Director Joel Schumacher: "Artists have the licence to make this guy purple and his hair blue and you just accept it in a comic book. We tried to make a living comic . . ."

➤ Terry Semel (*the big kahoonas at Warners*) asked me if I'd do it, I said I wouldn't if Tim didn't want me to. You know, out of respect. So I went to see Tim and he wanted me to do it. He was very anxious to be involved in his own projects and not do another Batman."

Burton retained a producer's credit but gave little input, apart from what Schumacher ambiguously terms "support". And so, in July '93, Schumacher took up the mantle, and after completing his Grisham-by-numbers affair The Client, starting shooting Batman Forever on October 1, 1994. Now, here in sweaty Atlanta, after eight months of toil, tribulation and big men wearing big make-up, he has delivered his own individual take on the Bat.

"I did all this research," he laughs. "It was great because I was on aeroplanes and in doctors' offices reading comic books. Everybody was wondering what this old hippy was reading comic books for, but I was doing my homework. The great thing that all the artists have done with Batman over the years is colour. They have this licence to make this guy purple and his hair blue, and you just accept it in a comic book. We tried in our own way to make a living comic. I thought that was the way to go with it."

And so he did. Batman Forever is a cornucopia of colour; a day-glo dreamscape of bold primaries set against the stone greys and shadowy blacks that made Burton's approach so distinctive. Gotham City has been heightened to pure fantasy.

It was the presence of Kilmer, however — the advent of a *new* Batman — that was the key; the letting go of things past. Keaton had gone. Burton had gone. Forever . . .

Chris O'Donnell as Robin: "Spandex jockstrap."

VAL KILMER WAS IN THE BATCAVE WHEN HE GOT the call. Actually, as the story goes, the cave was in deepest Africa and not suburban Gotham. Kilmer was researching a "special" personal project in the South African bush. He was on the blower, checking up on the details of his Tombstone publicity duties, when his agent happened to mention he had been offered the role of Batman.

"I felt sure, I felt it would be a lot of fun," growls Kilmer in a listless, laconic jive left over from being Jim Morrison for too long. "It was unlike anything I had done before. I didn't even look at the script or check who the director was."

Michael Keaton had been set to return. A healthy paycheque (reputed to be somewhere near $15 million) was waiting for him. Life was sweet in the Keaton camp. Then he walked. No clear answer has been given to why the Dark Knight got cold feet. Schumacher coolly and evasively cites "creative differences". As far as Keaton's replacement was concerned, for the director, there was only the one choice.

"I had met Val previously when I was casting for a film called Devil's Advocate which never happened," claims Schumacher on why he chose the surrogate lizard king to be a bat. "He was a fascinating guy. But it was while I was watching Tombstone, around the Christmas of '93, that I knew. Val did an extraordinary job as Doc Holliday, and seeing him on screen I thought this guy would make a great Batman — but there would never be that opportunity because Michael had the role."

The idea nestled in the back of Schumacher's brain before a flurry of talent fall-out gave him the opportunity to follow his feeling. Val Kilmer was to become the

be-cowled vigilante of cult stardom.

"We have an expression in this country: 'People have old souls,' " continues Schumacher with another of his American sayings. "There's something about Val that feels like he's been around a long time, which is why he's been able to do such complex roles for such a young guy. He's a very complicated man and a unique actor; he's also *stunning* on screen. It's a unique combination. There's a lot of young men who look like heroes but they don't have the depth. I believed that Val had the glamour to be Bruce Wayne, and at the same time you would believe he would go down to the cave, put on that suit and go out and kick butt."

For the 36-year-old "complicated" actor, life has been good recently. Not only has he landed the role of a lifetime but back home at his Santa Fe ranch, his wife, Joanne Whalley-Kilmer, is nursing their newborn son. Yet, for the past decade he has been one of Hollywood's outsiders. An "almost" kinda guy, whose choice of roles has been diffident, quite often at odds with career-enhancement. He accepted duds such as Willow and The Real McCoy, turning a blind eye to such hit material as Backdraft, In The Line Of Fire, and Indecent Proposal. His skill, however, has never been in doubt: The Doors may have been smothered in Oliver Stone's mumbled 60s surrealist nostalgia, but Kilmer's Morrison was borderline uncanny; while the contemporary Indian thriller Thunderheart carried sharp resonances with his own background — Native American blood courses through Kilmer's veins; and most recently he stole plaudits aplenty for his austere and memorable rendition of Doc Holliday. There or thereabouts is now a thing of the past; starring roles don't come much bigger than Batman, even if he is having to fill somebody else's Batboots.

Nicole Kidman as Chase Meridian: "Love interest."

"It is different," the actor asserts, a touch testy when it comes to the Keaton comparisons. "It is an entirely different film. There was a change of director, there was a whole change in the film."

Let's change tack. How is it that Batman as a concept has maintained a popularity unabated over the past 56 years?

"There's something strange, something alluring about the Bat," muses Kilmer. "It is kind of an *animal*. I think one of the reasons why Batman has endured and why he is still attractive is because he is a human being, but caught in extraordinary circumstances. He is this very wealthy man who has this dark passion."

Kilmer cuts a fine, more regal figure as Bruce Wayne. He is slick and sexy. And as the caped crusader he leaps, loops and displays *those* lips. When your body is smothered by a jet-black rubber suit, leaving only the square jaw visible, the lips become *real* important. Just ask Nicole Kidman, who as love interest Chase Meridian, got to try them out for size . . .

"He has the best lips I have ever seen," she giggles. "That's very important from a female perspective. If you wear a mask for most of the movie, you've got to have good lips."

As great a role as Batman may be, it brings hardships all of its own. No other part requires its actor to don a cumbersome rubber suit that slow cooks you at 140 degrees. Kilmer lost 5lbs doing the opening fight scene alone.

"It was like wearing the Batmobile," the actor quips. "It took an hour-and-a-half to get in it. I would act for an hour, then I would ➤

➤ have to take a break and *breathe.*"

And then there's Gotham itself — all those special effects, giant screen-stretching sets and numerous other "technical aspects" that have a tendency to diminish mere actors. Then, of course, there are the bad guys, with all their overbearing, pantomimic exuberance. They get to have all the fun . . .

Kilmer coughs up his first genuine laugh of the interview.

"Yes, I get ya, but they *don't* get to kiss Nicole. They get to tie her up, which is to their advantage, but I get to untie her . . ."

AH YES, THE BAD GUYS, THE BULLY boys, the merchants of boo and hiss. They are surely the *personality* of the Batman flicks. And following in the trail of Jack, Danny and Michelle, of The Joker, The Penguin and Catwoman, come Jim and Tommy, The Riddler and Two-Face.

Jim Carrey is the reason we are in Atlanta. He's filming Ace Ventura 2 in the lush locale, so it's been a case of moving the mountain to Mohammed. Grinning effusively, Carrey happily expounds on his take on the role that Frank Gorshin made his own on TV back in the 60s.

"I tried not to do a Frank Gorshin, because he was so strong in it," he chirps. "I mean, he really laid down the gauntlet. He *was* The Riddler. I didn't try to outdo him or anything like that. I approached this like me. What I would do, where I would go. I just did The Riddler like when Elvis went to Vegas. The art wasn't coming from the inside, it was from the outside. He adorned the outside because he had no identity."

And, true to form, the role of the tongue-twisting conundrum setter was once the property of another. Schumacher had worked long and hard to land Robin Williams for the part.

"I asked Robin," bemoans Schumacher. "I spent a year trying to talk Robin into it. He said, 'I'm going to do it Joel, I'm going to do it, but I just can't say yes today.' It's like asking someone to marry you; when they don't say yes, you start looking around. I don't quite know what Robin's hesitations were. Maybe it was me, maybe it was the part. I immediately thought of Jim, and the minute he walked through the door he looked exactly like the Riddler in the comic books — pencil thin. It's almost like Plastic Man, in a way. You know, he has no stunt person in the movie? All the stuff with the cane, all that stuff is him."

Twisting his silly-putty mug into the refined lunacy of the green-draped baddy also provided Carrey with the chance to kick in with his fabled improvisation. The funnyman designed costumes for himself, and riddled scenes with his hyper-shtick — Schumacher "accepted 90 per cent of the ideas".

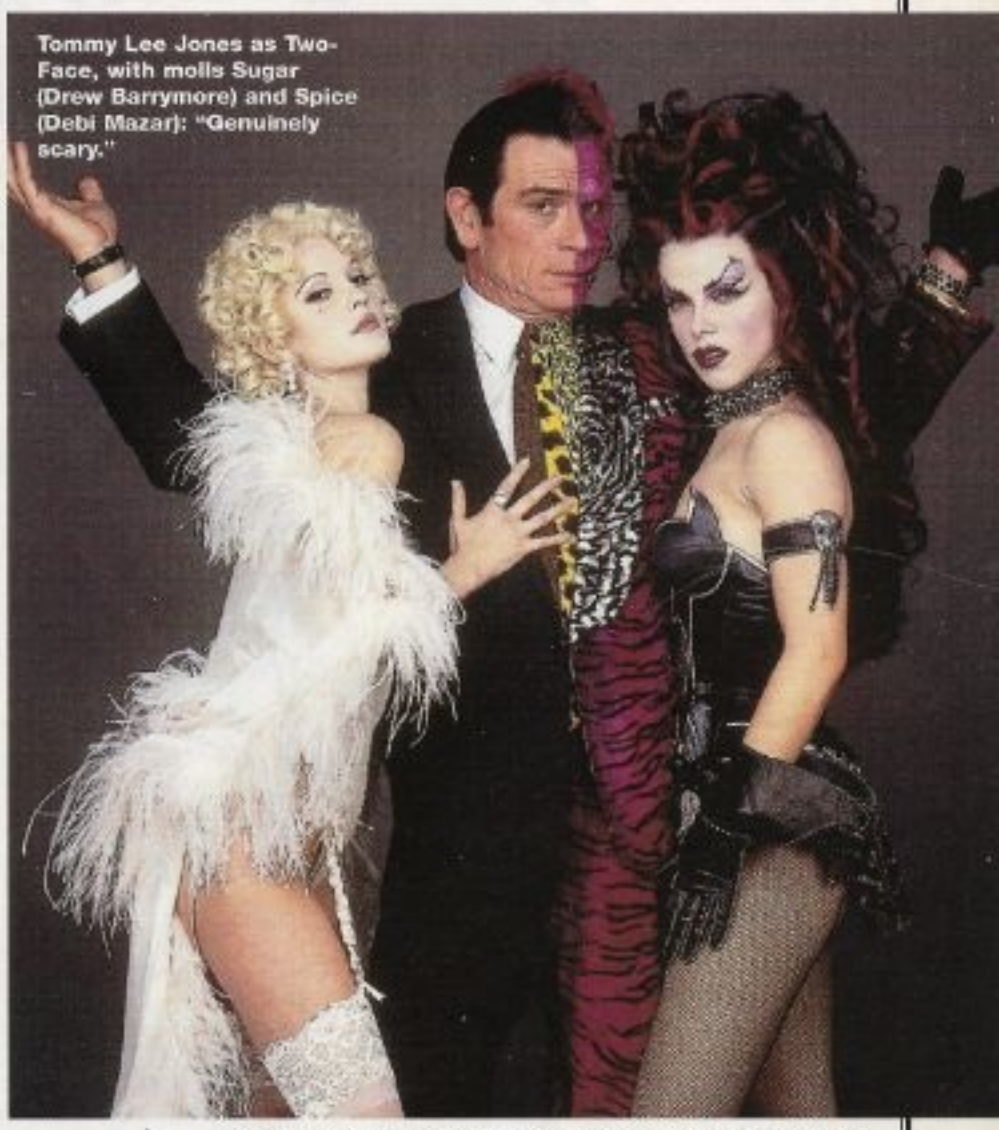
Although they bonded up for vigorous evil-doing on-screen, off-screen the huge personalities of Carrey and Jones were reported to be generating dangerous sparks. Each, however, tells it differently.

"I had a lot of fun working with Jim Carrey," murmurs the gravitas-packing Jones. "Being a wild, crazy cartoon character was something that I really loved and I could not have been in better company."

"Well, Tommy Lee Jones is an amazing actor," hoots the uptempo partner of the devilish duo, "but he scared the hell out of me. He's a ➤

Rock On, Tommy!

The two faces of Tommy Lee Jones



Tommy Lee Jones as Two-Face, with molls Sugar (Drew Barrymore) and Spice (Debi Mazar): "Genuinely scary."

TOMMY LEE JONES: genuinely scary man. Staring out at you through dead eyes, his gargantuan personality eating free space like a Great White, his landscaped face carrying more character than a summer season at the RSC, this is a man with his own agenda. He eschews glamour, he shuns fame, he plays the interview game without grace or humour, guarding his answers with hawk-like ferocity. Yet the tough-talking sometime rancher is one of the most respected actors in the business. There is one simple reason: talent. Pure, naked, uncompromising talent.

Born in San Seba, deep in Texan soil, in 1946, acting was, perhaps, a surprising choice for Jones. But Jones is prone to surprising you. A Harvard grad who majored in English, he was a celebrated college football player. The big movie career was a long time coming. There was theatrical work, then a small part in Love Story (1970), the requisite small roles in small movies, and a host of TV fodder. Then the watershed: JFK (1991) — Oscar nomination; Under Siege (1992); Blue Sky (1993); The Fugitive (1993) — Oscar; Heaven And Earth (1993); Natural Born Killers (1994); The Client (1994); Cobb (1994). A mighty performance at every turn. And now, in a typically Jonesian change of pace, comes the spitting, cursing hyper-horror of Harvey Two-Face, Batman Forever's deformed nemesis.

Deadpan, dry and unhelpfully curt, Jones plays it all down: "It was a big movie," he says, "intended for a large audience. There is something fun about that. It was physically big, the sets were enormous; some of them were bigger than football fields. The costumes, the make-up were nothing I'd ever been asked to use before. The originality was fun . . . It was Batman, which is supposed to be fun."

Jones grins, frighteningly. Next question. Thank you. And so we skim though a monotone Q&A session of easy questions and telegram style answers. The make-up (half his face contorted by acid scars coloured a divinely horrible purple) took four hours to apply. And, no, it wasn't a problem, it was very responsive to the muscles in his face. He researched Harvey in the comic books — the bent DA never made an appearance in the 60s TV serial. He knows Billy Dee Williams played Harvey in the first Batman movie, and, no, he doesn't know why they replaced him.

Surely an exaggerated comic book villain like Two-Face makes for a new challenge?

"Challenge? Yeah," drawls Jones. "You have to start four or five hours early to get the make-up on. It's just the challenge of day-to-day work in modern American action adventure cinema."

Jones plays down *everything*. He talks about his career as if it's about to collapse, constantly implying he's happy just to have a nine-to-five to get out of bed for ("I always need a job. Yes sir").

And what do you do in your spare time?

"Work."

Recently, Jones has occupied his spare time in a new venture: directing, turning Elmer Keaton's dry-as-a-bone ode to cowboys The Good Old Boys into a cable TV movie. The results have been impressive.

"I loved it. Loved it. Yeah," he growls. "That's the kinda actor I am. I tend to follow directors around, watching what they do, the decisions they make. I have been learning to be a director for a long time and I have had the best teachers in the world, in the best school in the world . . ."

IAN NATHAN

pain in the ass, basically, in the sense that he is not somebody that you want to hang out with too long. He is a complex, troubled individual and that is basically where he is at. It was like two rams smashing into each other; it was kinetic and interesting."

A personality contrast echoed in their responses to the classic Batman dilemma: the bad guys stealing the show.

"I don't want to be too fussy about language," fusses Jones, "but the idea of stealing scenes or stealing movies is nothing that I am comfortable with at all. I don't think that way. I look at the job at hand and try to do as well as I can with that job."

The former pet detective sees things differently.

"Ahh, fantastic! I was going to be humble there for a second, but to hell with it," Carrey grins. "I just hope I am doing it right; is it coming together? You can't think about that stuff because that would be, like, capsize time."

And if, in hindsight, it turns out that way?

"That's all right by me . . ."

There is one final ingredient in the Forever mix that gives it that all-new enriched flavour. A sprinkling of Robin, a pinch of Chris O'Donnell.

"It adds a balance to the reality," explains Kilmer on the addition of a buddy for the man in black. "He doesn't have superhuman power so he got a partner. From a different point of view, it helps the film. It gives a sense of the adventure really beginning."

For O'Donnell, the issues at stake were of a baser level, principally the geeky image Robin has been stuck with for 50 years.

"I was definitely worried," jokes the blond-mopped actor. "In the TV series Robin was definitely geeky. But when I read the script and realised what they were doing with the part, I didn't have any hesitation."

To introduce a Robin, Schumacher went back to the original comic book debut of the sidekick and the story of Dick Grayson, the orphaned circus acrobat adopted by Bruce Wayne. But ditch any preconceptions you have about Robin. *This* Robin has an attitude, with his hair shorn short and Keanu-like, an earring, a torso-moulded rubber suit and a mile wide streak of teenage petulance. *This* Robin is cool.

Mind you, kinky rubber get-up notwithstanding, O'Donnell still suffered the indignity of tights — courtesy of his spandex acrobat cossie.

"It was so bizarre," he jokes. "I'd be putting on that suit in the trailer, and it's like, 'Try this spandex jock-strap . . .' "

BATMAN HAS RETURNED, THE WORLD is about to cower in the shadow of the Dark Knight once again. The marketing campaign looks like a bid for world domination. But this is a whole new version of the hero and with that comes the gamble. If the audiences take to him like they took to the Batmen of the past, then all of Gotham will sleep contented in their beds. For now, optimism is the order of the day and Warners are behind Schumacher's vision all the way. Indeed, Kilmer has been signed on for another two movies.

So, is Batman forever?

"I really don't know," confesses Kilmer. "They've haven't talked about it at all. I guess it would be interesting . . ."

Batman Forever opens on July 14 and is reviewed on page 28.

And Thirdly . . .

"Threequels": are they any good?

Yes

Return Of The Jedi *(1983)*, Back To The Future Part III *(1989)*, Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade *(1989)*, Lethal Weapon 3 *(1992)*

Kind of

Escape From The Planet Of The Apes *(1971)*, Omen 3: The Final Conflict *(1981)*, A Nightmare On Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors *(1987)*, The Godfather Part III *(1990)*, The Exorcist III *(1990)*, Alien^3 *(1992)*

No

Jaws 3-D *(1983)*, Halloween III: Season Of The Witch *(1983)*, Friday 13th 3-D *(1983)*, Porky's Revenge *(1985)*, Police Academy 3: Back In Training *(1986)*, Child's Play 3 *(1991)*, Revenge Of The Nerds 3 *(1991)*, Critters 3 *(1992)*, Beverly Hills Cop III *(1994)*, RoboCop 3 *(1994)*

Na-na-na-na-na-na . . .

Adam West: the definitive Batman

FORGET KILMER. FORGET KEATON. The only Batman who ever mattered is Adam West, and he's somewhere in the States, on the end of this telephone line, laughing like The Hooded Claw and wrestling with this language that divides us.

"I think I understand your use of the word 'patch'. I've gotta remember that. A patch! Haha!"

I had suggested — sincerely, if obsequiously — that the current Batman movies were not a "patch" on the original TV series and Adam West is relishing this addition to his rich vocabulary.

"So, that's like a patch on an old tyre right? Haha, that's *wonderful*."

Wonderful was what Batman used to be. First broadcast on the ABC network on January 12, 1966, it had a brilliant theme tune, the greatest comic actors of a generation, more than its legal joke requirement, and the most onomatopoeic fight scenes. Which is why the new Batman is not a patch upon it.

"Well, they're just doing their thing like we did ours," he fences diplomatically. "I thought the first two were remarkable as far as production design and special effects, but Batman killed more people driving to the rescue than the villains did. Hapless pedestrians. I've maintained for a long time that the films should be more family-friendly, wittier and light-hearted, which is what I hear is happening."

Up to a point. But what of the atmos on the TV series? With all the jokes and comic asides, it looked like everyone was having a right old Steffi.

"It was like immersing myself in a broiling sea of madness and I was being torpedoed from every side. The trick was to make it look fun!"

The tone was rather camp, was it not?

"John, I never understood the word camp," he replies, a touch disingenuously. "To me it meant camp followers, like the girls who followed the Roman soldiers."

More like the guys who followed them.

"Haha, you're funny, but you're right. From the beginning we decided to make it an absurdist kind of satire, but make it believable for the kids."

Adam West as Bruce Wayne and Batman: "Absurdist."

MOVIESTORE

Tights notwithstanding, there was nothing camp about Batman, who regularly suffered a broken heart after falling for a glamourous villainess. What was his worst moment?

"When I had to send Catwoman to prison. It hurt, but it wasn't a patch on Macbeth! Another was when Jill St. John plummeted to her death in the atomic pile and was reduced to a cinder. That was terrible — her smoke got in my eye."

Adam West is thriving. He has appeared in The Simpsons and The Critic, had two rock groups named after him ("one in Scotland, near you"), and works on stage, TV and screen. But what of his diminutive better half, The Boy Wonder?

Now running "a post-production facility" in California, Burt Ward is in rude good health, apparently. Recent sightings of Ward in this country have generally been torrid tabloid tales of his sexual exploits. Did West remember his better half as a rampant ladykiller?

"No," he laughs, and then showing that the years have not affected his comic timing, he pauses. "But Burt does, and that's what's important, isn't it? . . ."

JOHN NAUGHTON

Batman: The Movie, starring Adam West, is available on video to buy, priced £10.99.